


City of Alexandria, Virginia

MEMORANDUM

DATE: FEBRUARY 22, 2007

TO: THE HONORABLE MAYOR AND MEMBERS OF CITY COUNCIL

FROM: JAMES K. HARTMANN, CITY MANAGER 

SUBJECT: CITY COUNCIL CONSIDERATION OF THE FY 2006 ANNUAL
REPORT FROM THE PARK AND RECREATION COMMISSION

ISSUE: City Council consideration of the FY 2006 Annual Report from the Alexandria Park and Recreation Commission (Attachment).

RECOMMENDATIONS: That City Council receives the Annual Report from the Alexandria Park and Recreation Commission and thank the Commission for its efforts on behalf of the City.

DISCUSSION: The Alexandria Park and Recreation Commission is an eleven-member advisory board created by City Council in March 1970 to study issues relating to park and recreation needs. City Council appoints nine residents to the Commission from three planning districts and two high school age members to represent the youth of the City.

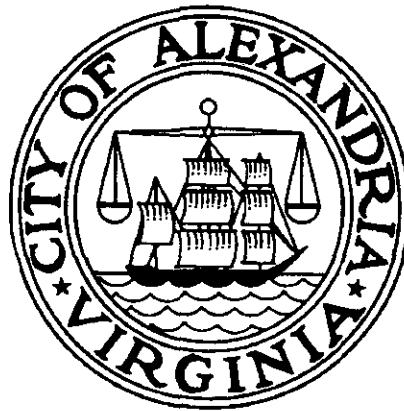
ATTACHMENT: FY 2006 Annual Report for the Alexandria Park and Recreation Commission.

STAFF:

Kirk Kincannon, Director, Recreation, Parks and Cultural Activities

Janet Barnett, Deputy Director, Recreation, Parks and Cultural Activities

City of Alexandria Park & Recreation Commission



FY 2006 Annual Report
July 1, 2005 - June 30, 2006

**ALEXANDRIA PARK AND RECREATION COMMISSION
ANNUAL REPORT FY 2006
JULY 1, 2005 - JUNE 30, 2006**

Introduction

The Alexandria Park and Recreation Commission is an eleven-member advisory board created by City Council in March 1970 to study issues relating to park and recreation needs. City Council appoints nine residents to the Commission from three planning districts and two high school age members to represent the youth of the City.

The purpose of the Alexandria Park and Recreation Commission is to allow City residents to participate in planning activities, serve as a panel to hear citizen suggestions or concerns relating to recreation and park programs, advise City Council on community recreation needs, and assist the Department of Recreation, Parks and Cultural Activities in its continuing effort to be aware of and sensitive to public needs, and to meet the changing needs of its diverse residents.

The Commission meets on the third Thursday of each month from September to July at recreation centers throughout the City. The Commission recognizes outstanding City residents, organizations, and youth at its annual ceremony in July as part of the City's annual Birthday Celebration.

Members of the Park and Recreation Commission for Fiscal Year 2006

Planning District I	-	Judy Guse-Noritake, Chair
Planning District I	-	Henry Brooks
Planning District I	-	William Conkey
Planning District II	-	Kenneth Basta
Planning District II	-	Ripley Forbes
Planning District II	-	William Hendrickson
Planning District III	-	David Dexter
Planning District III	-	Kaj Vetter
Planning District III	-	Kenneth Sharperson
Youth Representative	-	Owen Jones
Youth Representative	-	Aaron Wilson

City Staff to the Park and Recreation Commission

Kirk Kincannon, Director - Recreation, Parks and Cultural Activities
Janet Barnett, Deputy Director - Recreation, Parks and Cultural Activities

1. Park and Recreation Commission Accomplishments

- The Commission received specific project updates on and continue to support the following projects: Windmill Hill Park, Open Space Acquisitions, Four Mile Run Stream Restoration Plan, Land Bay K Potomac Yard park land and athletic fields, Jones Point Park, Wilson Bridge Project mitigation sites for parkland (Witter Street and Freedman's Cemetery areas), the All City Sports Facility, Patrick Henry Recreation Center, Chinquapin Park Recreation Center, Holmes Run Sign Improvement; Improvements to Minnie Howard Athletic Field, Multi-use and Athletic Court Repairs and Renovations. The Commission endorsed the Four Mile Run Draft Restoration Master Plan (Attachment 1), and the Commission expressed to Council the need for athletic fields at the Potomac Yard Development (Attachment 2); and
- The Commission received updates on and continue to support: the City youth anti-violence and anti-gang initiatives, out of school/after school program initiatives, pedestrian and bicycle improvements to on and off street trail systems, regular Community Clean ups in City Parks and Stream Valleys, Department efforts to expand and improve the City Tree Canopy, and efforts to Beautify the City through the use of the Departments existing "Adopt a Park" and "Adopt a Garden" Programs; and
- On November 12, 2005, the Commission Celebrated the renovation and Opening of the Jerome "Buddy" Ford Nature Center; and
- The Commission worked with their sub group, the Youth Sports Advisory Board, Department staff and a consultant to begin the development of the Department of Recreation, Parks and Cultural Activities Athletic Field Master Plan; and
- On May 6, 2006, the Commission, and senior level staff of the Department of Recreation, Parks and Cultural Activities, participated in a retreat that was designed to identify ways to improve the Commissions communication to the public and also improve communications between staff and the Commission. Topics included the roles and functions of the Commission and staff and the Commission's missions and goals. As a result of the retreat, Commission members and staff developed new relationships and identified techniques to improve communication to the public, define responsibilities and better serve the residents of the City; and
- The Commission solicited and received nominations for the Annual Park and Recreation Commission Awards and was awarded at the City's Annual USA/Alexandria Birthday Celebration held on July 8, 2006. Service to the Community Awards was presented to Bill Dwyer, Fran Redmon, and Nina Tisara. In addition, Corporate Neighbors Awards were presented to the Mark Winkler Company and to Charlotte Hall of the Potomac Riverboat Company. These citizens and organizations were recognized for the dedicated service in enriching the quality of life for the residents of the City of Alexandria.

2. Park and Recreation Commission Public Hearings

- The Alexandria Park and Recreation Commission encouraged public participation in the decision-making process involving recreation issues by holding public hearings. Public Hearings were held on January 19, 2006, for residents from Planning District I; February 16, 2006, for residents from Planning District II; and March 16, 2006 for residents from Planning District III. In addition, the

Commission held a Public Hearing on May 18, 2006 to receive comment on proposed increase of fees at the City Marina; and

- Beginning in fiscal year 2007, the Commission will hold topic specific public hearings, and following the conclusion of the topic specific public hearing, residents will be provided the opportunity to comment on any park and recreation issue. As part of the ongoing effort to provide open opportunities for residents to provide input on park and recreation issues, the commission also plans to hold all future public hearings and regular monthly meetings at various recreation center locations throughout the City; and
- The Commission held Public Meetings and Hearings on November 17, 2005 and April 20, 2006 to provide updates to the public and receive public input regarding the Charles Houston Recreation Center Design. Citizens were able to review and comment on the proposed design plans, program components and ask questions of the project team. Based on the public input, many program and design elements are included in the renovation plan for Charles Houston. The Commission was instrumental in keeping City Council informed on discussions and recommendations made by the public (Attachment 3); and
- On May 18, 2006 The Commission held a public hearing on fee increases to the City Marina operations; and
- On June 15, 2006 the Commission held a public hearing to receive comments on the Department proposal to begin the use of synthetic turf on City athletic playing fields.

3. Park and Recreation Commission Future Goals

- The Commission will continue to work with staff to evaluate existing recreation programs and will continue to make recommendations to enhance and expand programs that will serve the diverse needs of Alexandria residents. The Commission will hold public hearings on future Department projects and work with staff to ensure budget proposals reflect future CIP renovations and operational needs of the Department. The Commission will continue to work on issues pertaining to parkland and facility needs that have been identified in the adopted Department of Recreation, Parks and Cultural Activities Strategic Master Plan and City Open Space Master Plan.

Attachments: 1. Letter to Council Endorsing Four Mile Run Draft Restoration Plan
 2. Athletic Fields at Potomac Yard and Bridge Realignment
 3. Charles Houston Recreation Center



DEPARTMENT OF RECREATION, PARKS
AND CULTURAL ACTIVITIES

Kirk Kincannon
Director

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Park and Recreation Commission

February 16, 2006

Mayor William D. Euille
Vice Mayor Redella Pepper
Councilman Ludwig Gaines
Councilman K. Rob Krupicka
Councilman Andrew Macdonald
Councilman Paul Smedberg
Councilwoman Joyce Woodson

Re: Endorsement of Four Mile Run Draft Restoration Master Plan

Dear Mayor and City Council:

At the Park and Recreation Commission's regular January meeting we received a final presentation and copies of the draft Four Mile Run Restoration Master Plan. It is our pleasure to offer our full support to the City's adoption of this important document as presented.

It is our hope that this master plan will guide the innovative development of recreational and natural features along this waterway. This project area represents a large and important section of the Green Crescent identified in the City's Open Space Master Plan. The re-greening and enhancement of the stream and near-stream environment over the next several decades has the potential to fulfill that part of the Open Space Plan. While the vision represented in this master plan document will require a significant commitment on behalf of Alexandria citizens and our neighbors in Arlington County, we feel it is critically important to move forward with steady progress to implement this shared vision.

This commission looks forward to participating in the detailed planning that will follow adoption of the Master Plan and stand ready to assist in any way we can. We think this is going to be a great project, worthy of the full support of the City Council and citizens of our community.

Sincerely,


Judy R. Guse-Noritake, Chair
Park and Recreation Commission

CC: Jim Hartmann
Kirk Kincannon
Park and Recreation Commissioners

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Attachment 2

DEPARTMENT OF RECREATION, PARKS
AND CULTURAL ACTIVITIES

Kirk Kincannon
Director

1108 Jefferson Street
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Park and Recreation Commission

January 23, 2006

The Honorable Bill Euille
Vice Mayor Redella Pepper
Councilman Ludwig Gaines
Councilman K. Rob Krupicka
Councilman Andrew Macdonald
Councilman Paul Smedberg
Councilwoman Joyce Woodson

Re: Athletic Fields at Potomac Yard and the Bridge Realignment

Dear Mayor and City Council:

At our January 19, 2006 meeting the Park and Recreation Commission had a briefing from staff about the current discussion regarding the straightening of the Monroe Street Bridge. Though the start of construction is eminent we understand there are still concerns about some aspects of the approved design that have resulted in several recent community meetings. We want to reiterate that despite the current discussions, there is a very important need for the two full sized athletic fields at Potomac Yard and any plans under serious consideration relative to the development of Potomac Yard must accommodate these fields.

The Park and Recreation Commission wishes to make clear that consistently through the many community meetings leading up to City Council approval of the Potomac Yard Master Plan our participation and goal was to achieve an equitable amount of open space at the Yard, providing a spectrum of types of public open space ranging from active recreation fields to small neighborhood parks. Most importantly at one end of that spectrum we knew we needed to accommodate several full sized athletic fields at this location. At the time of the master plan approval we knew we had a field shortage in the City which would only become more acute over time. We often spoke of these Potomac Yard fields as being necessary to meet the increased demand that would come just from the new residences being built at the Yard. Without these fields, the pressure on other fields across town, already overused, would be greater.

The consistent and often stated policy goal of the Park and Recreation Commission in this development process, and supported by the City Council, was to accommodate two full size active recreation fields in a location abutting Simpson Park. A parcel of about seven acres was allocated in the approved plan for this use with the caveat that this parcel might be converted to a new elementary school if needed in the future.

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Early on in this project the developer built these two fields in a temporary location. Used heavily during the ensuing years, these have proved to be some of the best fields in town. The sports community and this Commission know it will be a short amount of time until these temporary fields are removed from service due to the realignment of the Monroe Street Bridge and construction at the Yard. We have accepted that and have been looking forward to beginning the design process for the permanent replacement fields. We understand that the approved alignment of the bridge reduced the size of the field area to just under six acres. The configuration of that piece of land is now an odd shape to accommodate the bridge alignment, making it barely possible to fit the two full fields in this location. Though a challenge, we have been assured it can be done.

At our meeting we were told that some of the alternatives being discussed relative to the realignment of the bridge at this time now show various connecting road alignments that would eliminate one or both of the promised full sized athletic fields that have been planned in this area abutting Simpson Field.

The Park and Recreation Commission would support any alignment that preserves the two full sized fields in this location, including the already approved plan, and strongly opposes any configuration that would downsize or eliminate either of these two fields. We cannot state this strongly enough. The recreational opportunities for our children and adults in this City far into the future cannot take a back seat to road alignment at this location. Surely the engineers can find a way to accommodate both. If the fields were already in place, the roads would be designed around them. That is the approach that must now be taken. We have been told the fields cannot be accommodated elsewhere on the Potomac Yard site. They have been approved and they have been in operation in a temporary location for years. In the final analysis, we cannot lose them.

If we may be of any further help in this important matter, please contact me.

Sincerely,



Judy R. Guse-Noritake
Chair, Park and Recreation Commission
703.739.9366, Ext. 105

Cc: Jim Hartmann
Kirk Kincannon
Rich Baier
Eileen Folgerty
Planning Commission Members
Park and Recreation Commission Members
Youth Sports Advisory Council



DEPARTMENT OF RECREATION, PARKS
AND CULTURAL ACTIVITIES

Kirk Kincannon
Director

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Park and Recreation Commission

September 29, 2005

Mayor William D. Euille
Vice Mayor Redella Pepper
Councilman Ludwig Gaines
Councilman K. Rob Krupicka
Councilman Andrew Macdonald
Councilman Paul Smedberg
Councilwoman Joyce Woodson

Re: Charles Houston Recreation Center

Dear Mayor and City Council:

The Park and Recreation Commission held its last regular meeting on September 8, 2005 at the Charles Houston Recreation Center in order to facilitate a presentation by General Services and the architects that have been retained for the renovation of this recreation center. The architects have completed a preliminary investigation of the current facility and site conditions and have explored several options for the renovation or reconstruction of the recreation center. They shared these with the Park and Recreation Commission and asked for our input on several issues. I would like to note that several weeks prior to this meeting General Services had hosted a community meeting around the same information and had a dialogue with members of the neighborhood about the same preliminary investigation and plans.

The team presented the Commission with one option to upgrade and expand the existing facility. Three options showing a fully reconstructed facility were also shown, exploring both one and two story options. All four options included a new, relocated outdoor seasonal swimming pool of approximately the same size as the one currently located at this site. Each scheme included reconfigured parking, which varied in the number of spaces provided depending on the proposed building footprint.

There were several observations and conclusions that the Commission reached after the presentation and questions.

1. The Commission has operated up to this point under the assumption that the existing building would be retained, at least in part, and that the project would consist of expansion and rehabilitation of this building. The presentation illustrated that this could in fact occur, but that the cost of doing so would be very nearly as much as tearing down the existing building and starting over with all new construction. In addition, the architectural investigation shows quite clearly that retaining all or part of the existing structure would mean there would be significant operational compromises that the community and staff would have to deal with even after the reconstruction was finished. General Services stated that the current building had outlived its useful life. The mechanical and electrical systems would have to be fully replaced were it renovated.

2. The Commission and the Community fully endorsed the need for the current level of services delivered at Charles Houston to continue during the construction period. General Services stated that even if the current building was retained, renovated and expanded that even limited operations could not continue during that time period on the site. That, of course, is also true if an all-new facility is constructed. Park and Recreation Department staff is working now with the community to find locations and methods to meet the community's needs during the construction period, whether the facility is renovated or fully replaced. General Services also stated that the length of the construction period would not be shorter if the building were to be renovated rather than reconstructed. The design team was in full agreement that demolition and all new construction could end up taking less time than renovating and expanding the existing building.
3. The Commission examined the program elements used in the preliminary design of the alternative schemes and believes this current building program reflects the needs of the community. We urged the team to design the program spaces with as much flexibility as possible to meet changing needs over the life of the building. This is true of every recreation center we will build or renovate in the coming years. The inflexibility of the concrete masonry construction of the current building is one of the reasons an all-new building makes as much sense as it does at this site.
4. Some members of the immediate community asked if the new pool could be constructed as a year-round enclosed pool. The Commission noted that all the City's pools associated with neighborhood recreation centers are operated seasonally, primarily for the children when they are not in school during the summer months. In addition it was noted that the only new indoor pool facility now contemplated in the City is a competition sized 25 meter pool which would be located at an expanded Chinquapin Recreation Center in the middle part of the City at some point in the future. The Commission still supports the notion that this additional large pool, co-located in the center of the City with the new TC Williams High School, and available for all Alexandrians is still a good course of action. General Services and Director Kincannon also related that the cost of operating and maintaining a small indoor pool, like the one suggested at this location, is very high relative to the cost of a seasonal pool. The Park and Recreation Commission recognizes that a decision about including an indoor pool, rather than a seasonal outdoor pool in this project is a decision for you, the City Council, to make but we would note that including a small indoor pool will set up a disparity with other neighborhood recreation centers, many of which have no pool at all. We also believe that the additional financial resources this would take are better spent in support of a new 25 meter pool.
5. Following the leadership of City Council, General Services indicated they are proceeding with the design of this building aiming for Silver LEED certification from the Green Building Council. The Park and Recreation Commission fully endorses this design parameter as being both environmentally and fiscally responsible. It is well understood that the initial investment in "green" building design will likely have a small construction premium attached, but the savings over time in the operational costs of the building will more than pay for this investment. In addition, the Commission urged the design team to look at including a vegetated green roof on this facility for several reasons.

First, regardless of which of the four design directions is pursued further, there is very limited room on the site for anything but the building footprint, parking and the small outdoor spaces associated with the senior and after-school programs. It appears there is no room to

handle the storm water from either the building or parking anywhere on the site as is required by code. A green roof will likely be necessary for that reason alone.

But secondly, the Commission recognizes that the Park and Recreation buildings should set an example as the most environmental buildings in the City. This is the green agency in Alexandria. We encourage you to include a green roof as a part of the building program from the start. We also noted that the preliminary elevations presented to us took their design cues from the past, from the architectural language of the residential neighborhood in which this building will sit, made of brick and with sloping roof lines. We urged the architects to instead to look to the future, where this building and others like it take a different architectural form based first on energy conservation and then the functionality of what goes on inside. This is not a residence. It is a community place of recreation and gathering and the exterior should reflect that clearly.


6. One more note in regard to environmental concerns. This site, challenged by a program that asks much of a small piece of land, will not hold enough parking to meet current code requirements under any design scenario. The balance between the building function and footprint, between green space on this site and the parking will have to be debated by the community, the Planning Commission and the City Council. We need to design the site to encourage people from the neighborhood to walk to it rather than to drive, and we must be innovative in the way we design whatever parking the site will in fact hold. All aspects of the site design need to employ Low Impact Design (LID) techniques. This is a good place for "green" parking concepts to be applied.

With these things in mind, it is the feeling of the Commission that the best course of action at Charles Houston seems to be to tear down the existing building and build a new facility that will serve this neighborhood for the foreseeable future. We endorse the LEED aspects of the program, and encourage you to make LID site design and a green roof part of the base building design as well.

A clear direction from you on these basic design aspects, as well as direction on an indoor versus an outdoor pool, will be required as soon as possible in order for this project to proceed. When you have set these basic design parameters and endorsed the other aspects of the building program, the Park and Recreation Commission, in conjunction with General Services, will hold a public hearing at the center as soon as possible to garner community input within that design framework in order to start the design development process. We promised this to the community members that attended our meeting on September 8th.

If you have further questions of the Commission regarding this facility, please feel free to contact me. We think this is going to be a great project, though we are fully aware it exceeds the resources allocated to it at this point in time. In budget testimony over the last several years our Commission has indicated that we thought this would be the case. Never the less, we think an additional investment to assure a facility that meets the neighborhood's needs into the future is a worthy one at this location.

Sincerely,


Judy R. Guse-Noritake
Chair
Park and Recreation Commission

CC: Jim Hartmann, Kirk Kincannon, Peter Geiling, Park and Recreation Commission Members